

YOUTH PROGRAMS IN GENERAL

Introduction to Youth Programs

The programs referred to in this manual have been developed in widely varying circumstances. This variety comes about because of many factors and each program has had to adapt to such realities as:

- Is it an urban or rural setting? There is a difference between a large city and a small town in terms of who is acquainted with whom and how well. This might influence how much flexibility the school has to support the program or who in the school is approached first and even what constitutes a “successful” program. For example, the bureaucracy in Buffalo, New York, with 48,000 students in 75 schools, requires a very different approach from that in Walton, New York, with fewer than one thousand students in one central school.
- Large vs. small schools. When students in a big city high school are in an unfamiliar setting, they may be reluctant even to take off their jackets (too many things can “disappear”) until some trust is established.
- Timing. Days that can be made available for students to take workshops (3 consecutive days, 3 alternating days, Thursday/Friday/Saturday, etc.).

Decisions will vary on such points as:

- Total number of hours of workshop. Many programs offer workshops limited to three consecutive school days (3 x 6 hours), some offer workshops spread out on a weekly basis, while some provide overnight accommodations for a weekend workshop.
- Certificates and their wording. For example, AViS does not give certificates.
- Orientation. Generally an adult facilitator, sometimes along with student facilitators, does face-to-face orientation with high school student groups; no orientation is done for teacher workshops but background material is supplied.
- Mixing teachers and students. Some programs keep adults to a minimum in high school workshops—only the necessary teacher chaperones (one or two by school regulation). Occasionally AViS has invited three or four parents to an overnight high school workshop with good results. Other programs, like the HIP/RAVE program in New Jersey, encourage a mix of adults and students as workshop participants.

Setting the Stage

In line with the AVP tradition of going where we are invited, it is more useful to express concern and offer help rather than imply, or say, “Boy, do you need AVP!” Some suggestions:

- Going slowly during planning will make things easier later on. It is important to resist moving too quickly, which can be a temptation if we operate in an urgent “crisis” mode. A lot of time may be needed to talk with various groups within the school who may need, or want, to know what’s going on. This can include the administration, guidance staff, school board, parents association, health and social workers, probation officers, security, etc.
- Stress to administrators that AVP takes a period of time to effect a change of atmosphere in the school community. It is not a “quick fix,” therapy or a list of techniques for breaking up fights but a process of establishing a different environment — one that fosters an attitude of understanding and respect across age and role lines.
- Involvement in AVP doesn’t mean we will never “spill the milk” again. We won’t suddenly become perfect, but maybe we will spill the milk less often and be able to clean up the mess more quickly.

- Diversity among participants adds to the richness of the experience. A workshop peopled exclusively with needy or “at-risk” students usually doesn’t work well. Having students of various ages, backgrounds, genders and cliques interacting with adults such as school staff, parents and general community members begins to break down barriers and broaden everyone’s perspective. The process of building respect and acceptance among everyone present really helps build community both within the school and in the surrounding community.
- In mixed workshops a proportion of about fifteen students to five adults works well.
- Participation in AVP is voluntary. People may be encouraged to attend, but mandatory attendance is usually counterproductive, if not outright disastrous. Typically, after one workshop is held in a school, many hesitant students will choose to attend at the urging of their peers.
- However, some models offer a workshop or a shorter program across an entire grade, for example, five different classes in the same grade doing five simultaneous workshops.
- Having three consecutive days for the workshop is best, but sometimes bureaucratically this is not possible. And sometimes more needy participants may find such an intense experience overwhelming.
- It can be very helpful if some school-based person such as a guidance counselor or a caseworker can take an AVP workshop before beginning to make plans for introducing AVP into that person’s school. Such a knowledgeable “inside advocate” for the program can be a contact person or liaison (see Arrangements with the School below) and can help set up the program.
- Be sure, as well, to invite other support staff members to every workshop. They can make significant contributions to the group and may gain valuable insights.

Arrangements with the School

A school-based liaison (guidance counselor, physical education teacher, etc.) is needed to take care of arrangements such as:

Scheduling (Time, Place, and Back-up Personnel)

- Different groups have experimented with a variety of time “models.”
- Workshops conducted off-site insure confidentiality and avoid interruptions. Suggested locations are a church, fire hall, Mason hall, retreat house, camp. If this is impossible, it is essential that the in-school location be private, quiet and without distractions.
- Some have found it extremely beneficial to schedule the workshop overnight, especially with high school students. This allows time for participants to interact personally in a safe setting without the typical “demands and distractions” of the school day, but **it does require through-the-night supervision.**
- Schools usually must have some faculty or staff member present during the entire time period students are off the premises for a school function.
- An immediate contact for emergency situations (health, extreme discipline, etc.) should be prearranged. A counselor should also be “on-call” for backup. Both of these individuals should be familiar with AVP. Means for contacting them should also be planned.

Lining up participants:

- “Inviting” participants, both older and younger, is a good way to ensure diversity. Some parents may need some direct contact in order for them to understand and accept the purpose and value of the workshop. It is valuable for people to have the right to turn down the invitation. However, in some school systems workshops are offered across an entire grade and students are expected to attend.

- The age span for students probably shouldn't be too wide. For instance, two groups, one composed of grades six through eight and the other composed of grades nine through twelve, will work better than one group covering grades six through twelve.
- You will want a list of all participants who have signed up, which may be surprisingly different from the group which will eventually show up! (You'll learn to deal with this.) Find out who will be responsible for taking attendance.

Informing participants of their responsibilities:

- General school regulations need to be discussed (e.g., hats, smoking). Do regulations pertain to off-campus activities? Students attending workshops at another school need to know and agree to the host school's regulations.
- Students will be required to make up any school work they miss. The students and their parents need to be informed of this. It is important to alleviate teachers' concerns about missed classes.
- Teachers and parents need to know that the school administration supports what the students are doing. The administration might write and distribute a letter to participants' parents and teachers.
- Teachers might be asked to have assignments for participants available before the workshop starts.
- Teachers or others might volunteer to act as mentors for a few students in each workshop to check to see if the students need help catching up with school work.
- Tutoring and "make-up" time might also be pre-arranged.

Setting up orientation time:

- It is helpful to have an orientation time (about fifteen minutes) for students and adults separately. This way you can tune into their different energy and concerns more appropriately. (See "Orientation of Participants," following) Showing a short video of an AVP Workshop might be effective here.

Providing supplies:

- Ask the school to furnish snacks, meals and workshop supplies, such as easel, markers, access to the copy machine and possibly transportation (if the workshop is conducted off-site).

Requesting donations:

- We suggest that you request a donation from the school to cover additional materials (broken squares, tinker toys) and facilitators' expenses (telephone, transportation). Some area councils suggest something in the area of \$100 per workshop. Many schools need a written request for such "donations."

General Arrangements:

- Arranging for a team of four or five, with one or two student facilitators, works well. Student participants definitely appreciate student facilitators. Having two young people on the team gives them important peer support. With a team this size, one (adult) member can give extra time to anyone who may need it. (See "Notes for Lead Facilitators," Sect. C)
- Gather materials the school isn't able to supply according to the exercises you decide to use. Using the accompanying, "Packing for a Workshop," (Sect. C) might help.

Orientation of Participants:

It has worked well having separate orientation times for students and teachers/others, several days before the workshop. Most of the information that needs to be covered is the same. “Responsibilities” is about the only area that differs (see below). Points to cover are

Opening:

- Welcome them and tell them that you’re pleased that they’re coming to the workshop. Let them see your enthusiasm.
- Introduce yourself, using your full name. Explain that we use first names during the workshop. Afterward, students will have to go back to the more formal way of addressing their teachers and other adults. (Though some adults are a little concerned about this, it doesn’t seem to create subsequent problems.)

Participation:

- Say something about everyone being on equal footing during the workshop. We all hope to relate to everyone as a person, not as “teacher” or “student,” or “youngster” or “adult.” We depend on everyone’s contributions to make the workshop “work.”
- Explain that they may be interacting with people they don’t know well. We hope to establish a safe place where we can get to know ourselves and others better. They might want to imagine, in the time before the workshop, what a “safe place” would be like.

Activities:

- Talk a bit about “experiential.” We don’t teach classroom-style; we learn together from exercises, games, projects, and discussions. You may want to do the “Paper Bags” exercise as an sample of “experiential.”
- Mention casual dress. Workshops are active; comfortable clothes and sneakers are perfect.

Schedule:

- Make sure everyone knows the dates, times, location of the workshop and the need to attend all sessions. Also clarify plans for food and transportation.

Responsibilities:

- **Students:** They should have been informed of the need to make up school work, but it’s good to say it again. Smoking regulations are very important to clarify. Making sure all are willing to comply with the regulations avoids complications later.
- **Adults:** Ask teachers to relax while in the workshop and leave the driving to the facilitators, who will maintain safety. This will be done in an AVP fashion, which is different from what’s required in a classroom. If they are uncomfortable with something in the workshop, ask them to express their feelings as a “concerned person” rather than as a “teacher,” “parent,” etc. Explain that you have a back-up person you can contact in an emergency.

Conclusion:

- If they have no questions, thank them for their time and say that you look forward to seeing them in the workshop!